

XXI.—*On the sculptured alabaster tablets called Saint John's Heads.*

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SCATTERED up and down England in museums, churches, and private collections, are a number of small sculptured tablets or panels of alabaster, of which the principal feature is a head lying on a dish or charger, generally flanked by figures of saints and sometimes with other accessories.

These tablets have been more or less a puzzle to antiquaries for a long time, and various conjectures have been put forward as to the meaning of the subjects represented.

Most of the known examples bear traces of painting and gilding, and they appear to be of the same date, and many of them from the same workshop.

The earliest notice of these tablets that I have come across is that by Dr. Stukeley in his *Palæographica Britannica*, No. ii. published in 1746. Opposite page 52, he gives an illustration of one of these tablets, then in his possession, which he thus describes :

I have some elegant pieces of old sculpture in alabaster, in *mezzo rilievo*, which I take to have been portable or private altars high raised. one of them, has belonged to some chapel dedicated to *St. John Baptist*. It was given me by my worthy and learned friend, *Samuel Gale*, Esq ; 'tis exactly a foot in height, below, is the whole figure of the *Baptist* in prison, his hands bound ; above, his head in a charger, but of a larger size. the bare head is three inches and a half in height, incompass'd with saints and martyrs. the beard in both these figures, is represented short, broad, and even at bottom. for the readers curiosity the sculpture of it is here exhibited.

On November 12th, 1789, one of these tablets was exhibited to the Society of
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Antiquaries by the Rev. John Pridden, who described it as representing "the head of St. John the Baptist on a discus and surrounded by five figures." This tablet is figured in Schnebbelie's *Antiquaries Museum*, published in 1791, and in Nichols' *History of Leicestershire*,^a published in 1811; and in both cases is described as the head of St. John the Baptist.^b

The next notice of these sculptures is in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824,^c where the late Mr. J. B. Nichols, in a letter to the editor, takes exception to Mr. Pridden's description of the tablet exhibited to the Society in 1789, adding: "The foregoing will, I think, be found to be by no means the truth." After stating that he possesses two sculptures in alabaster of very similar design, he quotes a long letter from Dr. Meyrick, who gave him one of the panels, putting forward what he calls a "more correct account of the design" of the sculptures. Dr. Meyrick's theory was that "The Carving represents the Syrian legend of the image of Christ, which originated probably soon after the siege of Edessa in 540, and which asserts that Christ gratified the faith of King Abgarus by granting to him his picture, the perfect impression of his face on linen, his having invoked his healing power, and offered the strong city of Edessa to protect him against the malice of the Jews."

The theory put forth in Dr. Meyrick's letter was immediately challenged, also in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824,^d by the Rev. Edward Duke, the possessor of another of these tablets. Mr. Duke reviews the descriptions of the other tablets given by Nichols and Stukeley, as well as Dr. Meyrick's theory, and suggests that the sculptures were really intended to represent "the personification of the Holy Trinity, surrounded by saints, martyrs, and defenders." This theory he based on the idea that the central head is that of God the Father, that God the Son is typified by a figure in base, and God the Holy Ghost by a representation of the soul at the top.

The correspondence was continued by the owner of another tablet, who signed himself "T. A.," and by another writer under the initials "E. I. C." Both these writers urged that the central subject represented the Vernicle or image of Our Saviour's face.^e

^a Vol. iv. part ii. page 461.

^b It is also engraved in Fosbroke's *Encyclopedia of Antiquities*, published in 1825, but is there described as representing the Syrian legend of the head of Christ, a theory put forth by Dr. Meyrick in 1824.

^c Part i. 397.

^d Part ii. 209.

^e *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824, part ii. 292, 293.

In 1850, the late Mr. John Gough Nichols contributed a valuable note on these tablets to the volume of *Bury Wills and Inventories* published by the Camden Society, in which he upholds the old theory that these carvings represent St. John's head, surrounded by figures of other saints.^a I shall have to refer to this note again.

In 1855, our Fellow Mr. J. E. Nightingale exhibited to the Archæological Institute one of these tablets, which is described and figured in the *Archæological Journal* as the head of St. John the Baptist.^b

In 1871, our late Fellow Mr. Albert Way communicated some remarks on these tablets to the Royal Archæological Institute, in a description of a sculptured image of St. John the Baptist found in Easton church, Hants. Mr. Way's remarks are as follows :

Numerous small tablets of alabaster have been noticed and figured in archaeological works, and of these several have been brought before the Institute, in which various figures of saints are found introduced, mostly as accompaniments of a peculiar subject that has been regarded sometimes as the vernicle, or the *verum icon*, the head of our Lord, but which appears undoubtedly intended to represent the severed head of St. John the Baptist in a charger—the *caput Johannis in disco*—a subject of frequent occurrence in various works of an ornamental character, and amongst these upon seals and personal appliances. It may be here remarked that certain objects of this description have been regarded, it is believed with much probability, as having been associated with some special feeling of veneration connected with the *cultus* of St. John the Baptist.^c

The latest contribution on the subject is a paper in the *Transactions of the Derbyshire Archæological and Natural History Society* for 1886, by our Fellow the Rev. J. Charles Cox, LL.D, describing an example belonging to the vicar of Findern, Derbyshire. Dr. Cox reviews the various theories already put forth, but accepts none of them, suggesting instead the entirely novel one, that the sculptures represent some version of the so-called "St. Gregory's Pity."^d

We thus have five explanations of these carvings to consider :

1. That they represent the head of St. John the Baptist in a charger, with figures of saints, etc. ;
2. That the central subject is the image of our Lord's face given to Abgarus after the siege of Edessa ;

^a *Bury Wills and Inventories* (Camden Society), 255.

^b *Archæological Journal*, xii. 184.

^c *Archæological Journal*, xxix. 93.

^d Since the present paper was written Dr. Cox has expressed to me his entire concurrence with my explanation of these sculptures.

3. That the three Persons of the Holy Trinity are represented;
4. That the central head and disc represent the vernicle, or imprint of our Saviour's face;
5. That the sculpture represents a variety of "St. Gregory's Pity."

This last theory has been worked out by Dr. Cox with much care and ingenuity, and, despite the fact that the so-called "St. Gregory's Pity" is invariably represented differently in English art, we might be disposed to accept it, had we not strong evidence in support of another explanation.

On the same grounds we cannot accept either of the two seemingly reasonable theories that the principal subject represents our Lord's face.

The theory that the three Persons of the Trinity are represented, though ingenious, will not hold, since several of the tablets have no third subject which can symbolize one of the three Persons.

The remaining theory, that the sculptures represent the head of St. John the Baptist in a charger, accompanied by figures of saints and other accessories, is, as I hope to show, not only the most likely, but one that is supported by very strong evidence.

In the cathedral church of Amiens is preserved as a most precious relic the front part of a human skull, brought thither from the East in 1206, and reputed to be part of the skull of St. John the Baptist. It heads the list of relics in an inventory of 1347, but is simply described as "*caput beati Johannis Baptistæ*."^a The inventory of 1419 calls it "*faciem beati Johannis Baptistæ*," and describes it as set in a silver dish adorned with precious stones, and furnished with a jewelled cover, also of silver, in the form of a man's face.^b The inventory of 1535 describes it in great detail as being enclosed in a covered vessel of gold, given by king Louis XI. (1461-1483), and adorned with divers jewels and pearls, all of which are enumerated.^c The relic was in much the same state when Du Cange

^a *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, x. 254.

^b 1419. In primis habemus faciem beati Johannis Baptiste incastratam in pelvi argentea munita per ora lapidibus preciosis. videlicet. saphiris. smaragdis. granatis. thopasionibus et pellis. et in summitate faciei subtus cristallum sunt lapides incastrati saphiri et smaragdi et quinque grosse pelle. Item super dictam faciem est facies hominis de argento in qua sunt multi anuli infixi de auro et monilia sunt etiam alii plures lapides preciosi inter quos est unus grossus saphirus in fronte dicte faciei. et in dextera parte faciei ipsius est unus magnus camaheu cum facie hominis ligata ad modum Sarracenorum.—*Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, x. 277.

^c 1535. Ung vaissel d'or de viij carres a quatre pietz avec le couverchel tout dor donne et offert a l'honneur de Dieu et monseig. St. Jeh. Baptiste par deffunt de bonne memorie le Roy Loys xj de ce nom pesant ensemble 1 marc x unches.

published an engraving of it in 1665, in his *Traité historique du chef de S. Jean Baptiste*, which is reproduced in vol. xxv. of the *Acta Sanctorum*.

It is not necessary to enter at length into a history or description of the relic ; I must, however, call attention to one feature.

Du Cange, in describing the relic itself, says :

Au dessus de l'oeil gauche est un petit trou en longueur, qui a donné suiet à quelques uns de dire, que comme Herodias, suivant le rapport de Saint Hierosme, ayant reçu la testle de Saint Precurseur, en perça de l'éguille de ses cheveux la langue, de laquelle ce Saint avoit repris

Aud. vaissel et couverchel sont quatre unches et deux estrelinz d'argent dore qui font la cloture du couverchel sur ledit vaissel lesquelz sont prisiez aud. poix pour x.

Item dedens ledit vaissel dor y a ung plat dor auquel repose le face du chef monseig. saint Jeh. Baptiste pesant xviiij marcs deux unches et sur le bord dud. plat y a deux esmeraudes six saphirs deux amatistes deux topasses et trente deux perles en onze assietez les armes de France environnees de xiiij perles et une petite esmeraupe sur le couronne pesant xviiij marcs.

Aud. grant vaissel dor sur led. plat ou repose ladite face y a ung visage enrichy de plusieurs pierres precieuses et deux chapiaux dor ausquelz y a plusieurs pierres precieuses tant perles rubis saphirs que aultres petites pierres comme cy après sont specifiees. ladite face avec ses joiaux qui y sont attachez pesant quinze marcs dor.

An couverchel du dessusd. grant vaissel dor y pendent et sont attachies six agnus dor d'argent lun grant lautre moyen blanc et les quatre aultres d'argent dore avec affique d'argent dore a ung gros doublet avec quatre perles.

Et primes en hault et au milieu de lad. face y a une fleur dor et six pampes emmailles de blanc et rouge au dessus ung escu couronne les armes de France en laquelle fleur a ung ballet prisie ix^e. ou mil escus.

Aupres de lad. fleur du coste dextre a ung gros saphir brut mis en or a quatre crampons lun pardevant a este prisie xxx escus.

Item en hault du coste dextre aupres dudit grant saphir a ung fort maillet garny de douze perles trois saphirs et ung ruby au milieu

Item au menton dudit chef pend une grande pieche dor en laquelle est emprint d'un coste un Eloy assis soubz un pavillon et a l'autre coste une saint Andrien.

Item une nostre dame en forme dun tabliau garnie de plusieurs perles a lentour.

Item du coste senestre aupres du ruby ballet ung catton dor garny dun grant saphyr.

Item un fort maillet dor garny de six grosses perles au milieu dudit maillet a ung ruby ballet et au dessus une pointe de diamant ou une fleur blanche.

Item une aultre fort maillet dor garny de douze perles quatre esmeraudes et au milieu un ruby ballet.

Au dessous du menton de ladite fache est ung sanctuaire de cristal qui se baise et est ou on fait les estanemens.

Item un noble a la rose—ung noble Henry—ung lyon—un real—un demy escu de Roy—ung philippus—un escu au soleil—ung demy noble Henry—ung petit tableau auquel est ung saint Jehan icelluy tableau garny de trois perles.—*Memoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, x. 350.

ses incestueux adulteres, elle luy en donna aussi dans les yeux, et que mesme elle porta le coüteau sur le soucil.^a

In confirmation of the story told by Du Cange, I exhibit a photograph of part of the magnificent carved screen on the north side of the choir-stalls at Amiens, begun in 1531, where in one of the panels Herodias is shown in the act of striking St. John's head with a knife over the left eye. Below the carving is the title:

Le chef saint Ihan fut a table pose.
Puis dun cousteau dessus leul incise.

In an excellent description of these sculptures by MM. Jourdain and Duval,^b particular attention is drawn to the incident of Herodias and the knife, and the writers add in explanation:

L'os frontal qui constitue la majeure partie de la relique de S. Jean-Baptiste conservée dans le trésor du chapitre de la cathédrale d'Amiens, paraît en effet percé au dessus de l'œil gauche comme par un coup de poinçon ou stylet. Le trou est de forme circulaire et peut avoir une ligne de diamètre.^c

Now in most of the alabaster panels under notice the head has a deep oblique cut on the forehead over the left eye, and in one case this is indicated by painting. Since this can in no way be connected with the head of Our Lord, it is quite clear that it represents the place where Herodias is said to have struck the head of St. John with her knife.

I have no doubt many instances in illustration can be found, but it will suffice for my purpose to quote one.

Among the subjects embroidered on one of the splendid herse-cloths belonging to the Merchant Taylors' Company are four figures of angels, each holding a charger with the head of St. John Baptist, the patron saint of the Company. In each case the head has a bloody wound over the left eye, and on an accompanying scroll are the words:

CAPAT (sic) IOHIS BAPTEST (sic) · I · DISCO^d

^a *Traité historique du chef de S. Jean Baptiste* (Paris, 1665), 135.

^b *Mémoires de la Société des Antiquaires de Picardie*, ix. 161.

^c *Ibid.* ix. 228.

^d See *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries*, 2nd S. vi. 245.

But the fact of these sculptures representing St. John's head is placed beyond all doubt by one of the tablets before us, that belonging to Lord St. Levan. This has round the edge of the dish whereon the head lies traces of a black-letter inscription, of which the important words *ſcī ioh̄is* **B** are plainly visible on close examination. Another example has the head circumscribed: **Caput ſancte iſtorie.**

It should also be noticed that in the tablet belonging to the Rev. B. W. Spilsbury, the head is plainly shown with a severed neck.

I think it may now be taken as proved that the head is not that of Our Lord, but of St. John the Baptist.

That the head of St. John the Baptist in a charger was a favourite subject in mediæval art in sculpture, seals, paintings, and personal and domestic ornaments is well known. An excellent example in stone may be seen in the east alley of the cloisters at Christchurch, Oxford, where it is carved on one of the keys of the vault. The head of St. John the Baptist also occurs on the thirteenth century seals of the prior of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem in England. Among the ornaments in the cathedral church of Exeter in 1327 were ten cushions embroidered with the head of St. John and five shields;^a and "vj silver spones with Sancte John heddes of them" occur in a will of 1527-8.^b The will of John Fell, chantry priest of St. William's altar in York Minster, dated 1506, contains an entry of special interest as connecting the St. John's heads with the famous relic at Amiens:

To my lord Robert Wannop, abbot of Sanct Mary Abbay at York, to dispose aftur his mynd, a Sanct John Baptist heid of Amyas, lyng in a platur of tree, gyltid and gratid with stonys.^c

There was also "a Saint John's hed of wood" in the misericorde of Westminster Abbey in 1540.^d The splendid inventory of Henry VIII.'s jewels and plate in the Society's possession^e also contains several rich examples of St. John's heads:

^a 1327. Inventory of the cathedral church of Exeter.

Decem cervicalia, unde quatuor debilia, unum coopertum ex altera parte cum panno de samito, brondata cum capite Sancti Johannis et quinque scutis.—Oliver, *Lives of the bishops of Exeter*, 314.

^b *Test. Ebor.* v. 237.

^c *Ib.* iv. 244.

^d *Trans. London and Middx. Arch. Soc.* iv. 357.

^e MS.

Item a litell tablet of golde of Saynte Johns Hedde (f. 139b).

Item an Image of saynt Johns hedde set in a disshe of Agathe garnysshed w^t golde and set w^t divers small rubies (f. 195b).

Item Saynt Johns hedde in a disshe of Agathe garnysshed w^t silver guilt and set upon a foote of silver guilte^a (f. 196).

One of the companion volumes now in the British Museum also contains the entry:

Item a picture of Sainte Johns headde in a dishe of earthe.^b

This was probably one of the painted terra-cotta tablets made in large numbers at Lyons about the end of the fifteenth century, of which an imperfect specimen is in the British Museum. It consists of a square frame, represented as jewelled and enamelled, enclosing a circular dish with the head of St. John the Baptist circumscribed:

INTERRAT · MVLIÆ · NO · SVRÆ · MA · IOH̄A · BAP.

(i. e. Inter natos mulierum non surrexit major Johanne Baptista.)

A cast of the central portion of one of these tablets was lately presented to the Society by our Fellow the Rev. J. T. Fowler, M.A.

I have also met with a Scottish example:

1542. Inventory of James V. King of Scotland.

Item sanct Johnis heid with ane perle.^c

The following miscellaneous entries from inventories and other documents are interesting:

1446. Will of Joan, widow of Nicholas Blackburn of York citizen and mercer.

To her maid Joan Gray, a St. John's head with all its appendages.^d

1453. Inventory of King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

An old pall for Saynt Johnys hedd.^e

^a One of these is doubtless the "litle Cup of Agath with a hed lying in it" among the effects of Thomas Cromwell, earl of Essex, about 1540. *Misc. Gen. et Herald.*, iv. 5.

^b *Harl. MS.* 1419 A. f. 133.

^c *A Collection of Inventories and other records of the Royal Wardrobe, etc.* (Edinburgh, 1815) p. 66.

^d *Test. Ebor.* ii. 19.

^e *Ecclesiologist*, xx. 313. Probably the St. John's head was fixed up in the old chapel, as it is not mentioned elsewhere in the inventories.

1466. Inventory of Ewelme hospital, Oxon.
 Item a Seynt Johnes hede, peynted with silver foill.^a
1468. Inventory of Elizabeth Sywardby.
 In the chapel:
 De j capite Sancti Johannis Baptistae depicto iijd.^b
1472. Will of John Baddesworth, rector of Laxton, Notts.
 Communitati cantariarum (apud Suthwell) j magnum caput Sancti Johannis Baptistae in uno tabernaculo.^c
1479. Goods of Henry Higgin of Nottingham, butcher.
 Unum caput Sancti Johannis Baptistae, pretii vs.^d
- 1499-1500. Goods of Nicholas Wildgoose of Nottingham.
 j. cofera et vj. capita Sancti Johannis Baptistae valent viij d.^e
1523. Will of John Drake of Rochester.
 Item lege dompno Nicholao Dersingham monacho caput Sancti Johannis Baptistae.^f
- 1524-5. Inventory of John Grene of York, glover.
 A Sancte John hede ij s.^g
1534. Inventory of the goods of John Fisher, bishop of Rochester, in his palace at Rochester.
 In the brode galary.
 Item a saint Johnes hedde standing at thende of the altere.
 Item a boke pontificall lying vnder the same saint Johnes hedde.^h
1536. Letter from Anne Ronand (Madame de Bours) to Lady Lisle, March 24th.
 Mentions that her daughter "sends you a little silver cup and a head of St. John to put in a cabinet."ⁱ
1538. Inventory of Grey Friars, Winchester.
 ij seynt John headys ij d.^k
1539. Will of Nicholas Metcalfe, archdeacon of Rochester.
 Item I bequeth to Mr psone of Westhamfield the table of seynt John baptist in the hall.^l
1554. Inventory of Thurstan Tyldisley.
 In the chapel at Myerscough,
 One saincte Johns Hedde.^m

^a Napier, *Historical notices of Sweyncombe and Ewelme*, 128.

^b *Test. Ebor.* iii. 163.

^c *Ibid.* iii. 202.

^d *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, iii. 22.

^e *Ibid.* iii. 72.

^f *Rochester wills* (Somerset House), vii. f. 305.

^g *Test Ebor.* v. 195.

^h *Proceedings Soc. Antiq. Lond.* 2nd S. v. 297.

ⁱ *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic* (Henry VIII.), x. 213.

^k *Archaeologia*, xliii. 246.

^l *Rochester wills* (Somerset House).

^m *Lancashire and Cheshire wills* (Chetham Soc. xxxiii.), 112.

There can be little doubt that some of these entries relate to such alabaster tablets as those before us, although nothing is said about the material, nor any hint given of the design.

Fortunately one entry has been found which describes one of these tablets in terms which leave no doubt as to its identity with the St. John's Heads now under consideration; it forms the text for Mr. Nichols' admirable note in the Camden Society's *Bury Wills and Inventories*.^a

By will dated September 2nd, 1522, Agas Herte of Bury St. Edmunds, widow, bequeaths *inter alia* to her son Richard Jaxson :

a Seynt Johis hede of alabast w^t Seynt Pet^r and Seynt Thom's and the fygur of Cryst, w^t a choche of red sarsnet and grene ffrengyd.

She also leaves to another person :

a lytyll Seynt John's hed of alabaster w^t a scriptur, *Caput Sci Johis Baptiste*, w^t a clothe of golde w^t romayn letters of blacke weluet.^b

The first example, it will be noticed, exactly describes several of the tablets exhibited, and it is within the bounds of possibility that one of them may be the actual tablet formerly belonging to Agas Herte.

The second example gives the complete inscription on the tablet already described as bearing the words "*ſcī ioh̄is B.*"

The earliest notice I have found of a St. John's head of alabaster appears to be in an inventory of St. Kerrian's church, Exeter, 1417, which, after describing two images "*de alabastre*," mentions :

unum discum cum capite Johannis Baptistae.^c

but the fact of its being alabaster is not stated.

A will, dated 1432, of Isabella Hamerton of York, widow, contains an undoubted example. Among her bequests to Dan John Branthwate, chaplain, is :

unum lapidem alabaſtri ſecundum formam capitis Sancti Johannis Baptistae.^d

^a Appendix, 255.

^b *Bury Wills and Inventories*, (Camden Soc. 49), 115, 116.

^c Hingeston-Randolph, *Register of Edmund Stafford* (bishop of Exeter), 483.

^d *Test. Ebor.* ii. 23.

A St. John's head of alabaster was also among the ornaments of St. Katharine's chapel, Bridport, in 1473.^a

An exceedingly fine example is preserved in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, consisting of the head only, with the hair and beard disposed in wavy curls. It is of fifteenth century date.

The alabaster, of course, came from the well-known pits at Chellaston, near Derby, now unfortunately almost exhausted, but which formerly yielded the whole of the material for the alabaster slabs and monuments to be found in various parts of England. It was even exported to France and elsewhere.

A number of documents have lately come to light which show not only the source of the alabaster, but that these St. John's heads were carved and painted in large numbers in the town of Nottingham. The documents referred to occur amongst the corporation muniments, and have lately been printed in the useful series of volumes entitled *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*.

The earliest of these documents is the record of an action brought on October 31st, 1491, by Nicholas Hill against William Bott for the value of fifty-eight St. John's heads, part of them in tabernacles and "howsynges," delivered to him to sell, and of which the said William will not render his account, wherefore the said Nicholas is injured, and has damage to the value of five marks, etc.^b

In January, 1494-5, the same Nicholas Hill, described as an "alablasterman," or worker in alabaster, and elsewhere as an imagemaker, figures as defendant in an action brought against him by one Robert Tull, "husbondman," for non-payment of 12*d.* still due to him out of his wage of 3*s.* for carrying divers images and heads of St. John Baptist from Nottingham to London.^c

In 1499, Nicholas Hill, "alablasterman," again appears as defendant in a suit brought against him by Thomas Grene of Beeston, "playsterer," for a head of St. John the Baptist, price 16*d.*^d

We thus have proof of St. John's heads of alabaster constantly issuing from one workshop alone, for a period of at least eight years, of their being sent to London and probably elsewhere, and of so large a number as fifty-eight at a time being delivered to a salesman to dispose of.

In 1530, John Nicholson, "steynour," brought an action against John Cottyngnam, "ymagemaker," for detinue of a St. John's head, and half a quarter

^a *Hist. MSS. Commn., Appendix to the 6th Report*, 488.

^b *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, iii. 18.

^c *Ibid.* iii. 28.

^d *Ibid.* iii. 499.

of gold, price 10s., which head had been delivered to Cottenham to be painted, but had not been returned.^a

In the same year William Walsh of Chellaston sued the same John Nicholson, "steynour," for 18*d.* due to him

pro cariagio unius plaustrati lapidis de alabaster a Chellaston usque Notyngham.^b

How far we are justified in assuming that the alabaster tablets before us were all produced by the Nottingham alabastermen and imagemakers,^c I am not prepared to say. Their probable date agrees very well with the time when large numbers were being carved at Nottingham, and their curious general similarity of arrangement is suggestive of their issuing from one workshop or common centre.

The examples of these tablets that have come under my notice are twenty-seven in number, but four of these, as well as another doubtful example, are at present missing, and I have not been able to find any traces of them.

The tablets are all oblong in form, and range in size from 4½ inches to 18 inches in length.

They may be divided into four classes :

- A. In which the head alone occurs, with an accessory in base ;
- B. In which the head is flanked by two saints, and has an accessory in base ;
- C. In which other accessories are added at the top ;
- D. In which two more saints are introduced above the other pair ;

The smallest tablets mostly belong to classes A. and B., and the largest to class D.

The central subject in every case represents the head of St. John the Baptist, lying on a plain round dish. In at least six of the tablets the cut in the forehead over the left eye is shown, and in another instance is represented by painting. Where the colour remains the eyes are depicted as open. The hair and beard are varied in treatment, and usually gilt ; and the edge of the dish sometimes has a narrow band of gold or colour.

^a *Records of the Borough of Nottingham*, iii. 180.

^b *Ibid.* iii. 182.

^c Other Nottingham "alabastermen" and imagemakers, though not mentioned in connection with St. John's heads, were: Nicholas Godeman (1479), John Lingard (1495), Walter Hylton (1496), Thomas Hill (1499 and 1502), and Richard Starky (1529).

The dexter saint in tablets of classes B and C, and also of class D, where he always forms one of the lower pair, is in every instance I have seen St. Peter with a key and book. He is usually represented standing, but occasionally sitting, and he sometimes wears the triple-crowned tiara as bishop of Rome.

The sinister figure corresponding to St. Peter is in every case an archbishop, in albe, cope, and mitre, holding a cross and book. This is a usual way of representing St. Thomas of Canterbury. In an example figured by Stukeley, and now missing, the sinister figure is shown as St. Paul.

The accessory at the base of all four classes is either :

- (1) A half-length figure of Our Lord standing in a tomb; or
- (2) The Holy Lamb.

A solitary example has instead of either of these a seated figure of the Blessed Virgin with the infant Saviour.

The example figured by Stukeley has a whole length figure of Christ.

The figure of Christ is invariably represented as naked, and wearing the crown of thorns. The position of the arms is constantly varied, scarcely any two examples being alike; and the hands are either bound, or so disposed as to show the print of the nails, or to point to or hold open the wound in the side. In no instance is the right hand raised in benediction. The idea is clearly therefore to symbolize our Lord's Death and Passion, and not His triumphal Resurrection from the sepulchre.

The figure of the Holy Lamb conveys the same idea.

The accessory at the top in tablets of classes C and D consists generally of two angels holding up in a cloth, or in a pointed oval, a small naked figure to represent a soul.

In two cases an angel's head and wings occur, and in one instance a row of five angels.

One very fine example has the rare individual figures of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

In four of the six tablets of class D one of the upper pair of saints is St. Katharine, and two have figures of St. James the Great.

In such panels as retain traces of their original colouring the field is painted green, and diapered with groups of five white spots encircling a red spot. This peculiar device is characteristic of medieval sculptures of alabaster of the date of these tablets, which probably came from the same workshops.

The back of nearly all the tablets is flat, but roughly cut away for some reason at the bottom. They also all have two or more stumps of latten wire

fastenings run in with lead. This appears to have been the usual way of securing sculptured panels and images in position, and reference to it is occasionally found in churchwardens' and other accounts, as, for example, in those of Leverton church, Lincolnshire :

For lattyn wyer for ye ymage of alybaster.*

Of tablets of type A only five examples are known : of types B and C seven and eight examples of each respectively ; and of type D five, to which we may perhaps add a sixth. There is also a record of one very doubtful example.

It will be convenient to describe the several panels in detail before propounding any explanation of the meaning of the sculptures.

1. (Type A.) *John Parker, Esq. F.S.A.*



A "St. John's Head" of alabaster in the possession of John Parker, Esq. F.S.A. ($\frac{1}{2}$ linear.)

Height, $7 \frac{1}{6}$ inches ; width, $5 \frac{1}{8}$ inches.

This is the most simple in style and character of all the examples of these tablets that have yet been noticed ; it also differs much from them in style and execution, and perhaps it is a little earlier in date.

It is, as usual, of alabaster.

The device consists of the head of St. John lying on a plain charger ; with, below, a small figure of the Holy Lamb lying on a mount and looking up at the saint's head. The head has a short rounded beard, and long hair parted in the middle and hanging down on each side. There is no cut over the eye.

The back has the stumps of two latten wire fastenings run in with lead. Two of the corners as well as one side at the back have been cut or scraped away. This was probably done for medicinal

* *Archaeologia*, xli. 350.

purposes, as an example in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (No. 5, p. 17, *post*) bears an inscription stating that "powder of it is said to have done great service to sore eyes, especially where there was a white speck."

The panel under notice, like all the other examples, has been painted, but only very slight traces of the colour now remain.

2. (*Type A.*) *Stonyhurst College.*

Height, $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches; width, $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

This is by far the smallest of these tablets that has yet come to light. It is as usual of alabaster, and retains a good deal of its original colouring.

The saint's head lies on a plain charger, 4 inches in diameter, with a narrow red edge, and has the hair parted in the middle and hanging down straight on each side. The beard is simply pointed, and with the hair bears considerable traces of gilding. The features are somewhat rubbed, but there seems to be a small cut over the left eye.

Immediately below the saint's head is the Holy Lamb, lying on a mount. Its head is somewhat broken.

The field and mount are painted dark green with the characteristic groups of five white spots round a central red one.

The back of the tablet is deeply scored with lines, and is cut away at the bottom. It has two lead plugs with ends of latten wire, one at the top, the other just below the middle.

3. (*Type A.*) *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.*

Height: $8\frac{5}{8}$ inches; width, $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

A very good example, preserving its original colouring, as well as its case or "housing." (Plate XXI. fig. 1.)

The head has the hair and beard gilt, over red-brown paint. The hair is disposed in five pointed locks across the forehead, but is straight at the sides. There is no moustache except above the corners of the mouth, and the beard is straight and apparently rounded. The eyes are painted as open, but there are no traces of the wound having been represented over the left eye. The dish is plain, with the edge painted red.

In base is a half-length figure of Christ issuing from the sepulchre, wearing a

heavy crown of thorns. The left hand is upraised, and the right pressed against the side; but there are no marks of the nails. The hair and beard are painted black. The tomb is quite plain; and on either side of it is a tree, perhaps in reference to its being in a garden.

There are no side figures.

The upper part of the field is covered with a gold diaper, but the lower part is painted dark green with groups of a central red and five encircling gold spots.

This panel retains its original case. It measures $11\frac{1}{8}$ inches long by $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide, but has unfortunately lost its doors, which opened in the manner of a triptych. They did not close flat, but, when the panel is laid on its back, they are like the two sides of a sloping roof, the top and bottom of the case being gabled. The inside of the case is painted dark green, but has at the top a sloping piece coloured yellow or gilded with a stellate pattern in lozenges. The outside is uncoloured, save at the top, which is painted red. The wire hinges of the doors remain, and on the back is part of a leather strap for suspension.

The case should be compared with the perfect example of precisely similar fashion belonging to the St. John's Head in the Leicester Museum (See No. 10).

4. (*Type A.*) *Beaumont College, Old Windsor.*

Height, $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches; width, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

This is an interesting example, but has unfortunately been broken into three pieces, one of which is lost and restored in plaster. The original colouring has also been more or less restored.

The head has the hair and beard disposed in wavy locks, now painted brown, but probably originally gilt. There is no moustache except over the corners of the mouth. The eyes are not now painted, and the wound on the brow is not shown. The dish is quite plain; it measures $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter.

In base is a half-length figure of Christ in the tomb, holding up his left hand, and with the right touching the wound in the side. Round the head is a heavy dark-green torse. The hair bears traces of brown paint. The tomb is mottled in imitation of marble, and has on each side a conventional tree.

There are no saints at the sides.

The field is painted green with the usual groups of spots.



1



2

EXAMPLES OF "ST. JOHN'S HEADS"

1. ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD (No. 3).
2. RADCLIFFE COLLEGE, LEICESTER (No. 7).

The back of the panel is roughly cut away at the bottom, and has an upper and lower plug of lead with ends of the latten wire fastenings.

5. (*Type A.*) *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.*

A fragment only, measuring $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

Part of the central subject remains, showing that the head had long spiral curls of hair, and that the beard terminated in two similar curls.

The *caput in disco* was held up by two angels kneeling on one knee. Only the sinister one remains. He is covered with gold feathers or scales, and has two pairs of wings, one on the shoulders, the other on the hips, painted red, with peacock's feathers.

In base is the Holy Lamb, couchant and regardant.

The field is powdered with groups of seven spots, the central one red, the outer white or gold, on a dark-green ground.*

On the back is an inscription stating the sculpture to be a fragment of a representation of Saint John's head in a charger, etc., and concluding; "Powder of it is said to have done great service to sore eyes, especially where there was a white speck. Given by Dr. Huddesford, President of Trin. Coll. and keeper of y^e Museum Oct. 11. 1746. in whose family y^e whole formerly was."

It is possible that if complete this panel might belong to one of the more elaborate types.



Fragment of a "St. John's Head" of alabaster in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. ($\frac{1}{2}$ linear.)

6. (*Type B.*) *Rev. W. B. Spilsbury.^b*

Height, $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches; width, 7 inches.

An almost perfect example, retaining its original colouring. (Plate XXII. fig. 1.)

The head lies on a plain dish, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, with narrow gold border, and differs from all other examples in its peculiar pinched-up look, and in

* These do not show in the engraving.

^b Vicar of Findern, Derbyshire.

showing the neck cut off. The hair is parted in the middle, and hangs down on each side, and the beard is full and rounded; both hair and beard are gilt. Over the left eye is a long deep cut. The eyes are shown open.

Below the head is the Holy Lamb, couchant and regardant, lying upon a closed book with red cover and gilt clasp and edges.

The dexter figure is St. Peter in white under-robe with gold border, and white cloak or cope,^a edged with gold and lined with red. In his left hand he holds a closed book with blue covers and gilt edges, and in his right hand a large gold key. His hair and beard are gilt.

The sinister figure is an archbishop in an albe with gold border, and white cope edged with gold and lined with blue. The hair and the edges of his mitre are gilt. In his left hand he holds a long gold cross, and in his right a closed book bound in red, with gilt edges.

The back ground is painted dark green, upon which may be traced the usual groups of spots.

The back of the panel is flat, but chiselled away at the bottom. It has two holes one above the other, with lead plugs for wire fastenings.

This panel was purchased by the owner's great-grandfather at the sale of Sir Ashton Lever's museum.^b

7. (*Type B.*) *Ratcliffe College, Leicester.*

Height, $9\frac{5}{8}$ inches; width, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

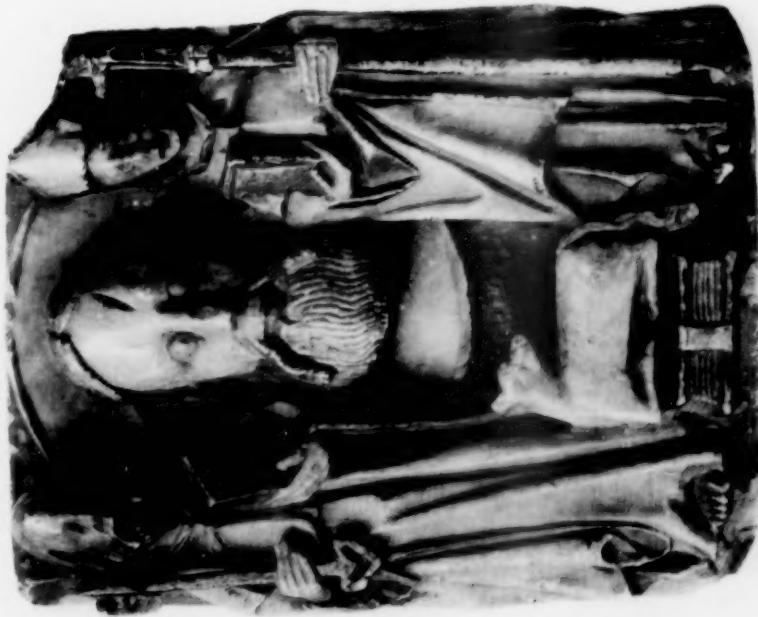
An almost perfect example, with its original colouring. (Plate XXI. fig. 2.)

The head lies on a perfectly plain dish, $5\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter, and has the eyes painted as open. The hair falls in three pointed locks over the forehead, and is wavy at the sides; the moustache issues from the upper corners of the mouth, and is long and curly, and the beard is partly divided into two short wavy curls. Both hair and beard have been painted some dark colour, and then gilt. Over the left eye is a deep cut.

Beneath the head is a half-length figure of our Lord standing in the tomb, wearing the crown of thorns and a loin cloth. The head is inclined to the right;

^a There are some slight indications of this having been once coloured blue.

^b A chromolithographed representation of this panel will also be found in the *Journal of the Derbyshire Archaeological and Natural History Society*, vol. viii.



1



2

EXAMPLES OF "ST. JOHN'S HEADS."

1. THE REV. W. B. SPILSBURY (No. 6).
2. BRITISH MUSEUM (No. 17).



the left arm with open hand, showing the nail-print, is extended downwards; and the right hand touches the breast. The hair, beard, and crown of thorns are painted black. The tomb has a moulded edge and base, and is painted blue, with groups of white spots.

On the dexter side of the panel is a tall figure of St. Peter, in a red robe with gold collar and border. His hair is also gilt. In his left hand he holds an open book, and in his right a large key.

On the sinister side is a tall archbishop in mitre, gold amice, albe, and blue cope. In his left hand he holds a long cross, and in his right a closed book with a spray of foliage on the cover.

The field is painted dark green, with groups of five white spots enclosing a red one. Above the dish the field is not coloured.

The back is flat, roughly cut away at the bottom, and has two lead plugs, one on each side, with the ends of fastenings of latten wire.

8. (*Type B.*) *The Right Rev. Bishop Butt, St. George's, Southwark.*

Height, 10 inches; width, $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

The head, of unusual breadth, lies on a plain dish, $5\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, with traces of a red border. The hair is parted in the middle and hangs down on each side. The moustache is long and curly, and the beard is disposed in two curly locks. Both hair and beard were gilt. There is no wound over the left eye.

In base is an elongated figure of Our Lord in the tomb, with black hair, beard, and crown of thorns, and girt with a red loin cloth. The head is slightly inclined to the right, and the arms are extended full length and crossed over the front of the tomb. The nail prints are not shewn. The tomb has a moulded top and base, and was originally coloured black.

On the dexter side is St. Peter, holding a closed book and long key. His hair was gilt, and his robes bordered with gold, and the outer one lined with red.

On the sinister side is an archbishop in mitre and choir cope, originally with blue lining. In his left hand is a tall cross, and in his right a closed red book with white spray on the cover.

The field above the head is plain, but below is coloured dark green with characteristic groups of spots.

The back is flat, cut away at the bottom, and has on each side a lead plug with remains of wire fastenings.

This panel formerly belonged to the Rev. Dr. Rock.

9. (*Type B.*) *The Very Rev. Canon Stokes.*^a

Height, $12\frac{3}{4}$ inches; width, $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

An unusually fine and large, as well as perfect, specimen. (Plate XXIII. fig. 1.)

The head lies on a plain dish, $7\frac{5}{8}$ inches in diameter, and has wavy hair parted in the middle and curled back to the sides. The moustache issues from the corner of the nostrils, leaving the lips bare, and is long and wavy, as are the whiskers. The beard is full and wavy, and partly concealed by the figure in base. The hair and beard are gilt, the eyes are half-closed, and over the left eyebrow is an oblique cut. The features wear a pained expression, and are very carefully chiselled.

In base is a half-figure of Our Lord in the tomb, with the arms crossed in front. The crown of thorns is painted black, and the short beard and long wavy hair are gilt. The tomb has a deep hollow round it.

On the dexter side is a figure of St. Peter in a long girded robe, and cope or cloak once lined with red and edged with gold. His hair and beard are gilt. In his left hand is a closed book with dark green cover, and in his right a large gold key. His feet are bare.

On the sinister side is an archbishop in large mitre, plain albe, and cope, holding a long cross and book. The mitre, hair, cross, and the edge of the cope bear traces of gilding. The book and pointed shoes have been painted dark green.

The lower part of the field is painted dark green with the usual groups of spots. The upper part of the field is plain.

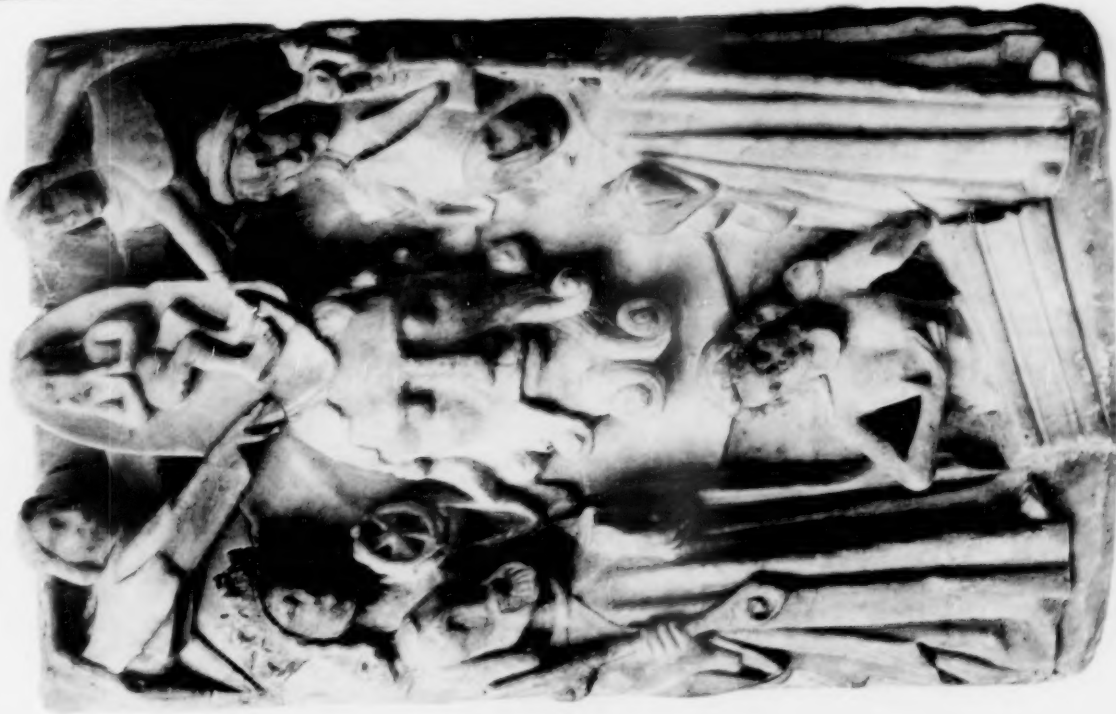
Across the top of the panel is a plain and massive double canopy, with embattled top and short round pinnacles. The coving has no ribs, but is painted red. The canopy itself has also traces of gold and colour.

The back of the panel is flat and has three lead plugs, one at the top and two at the bottom, for wire fastenings to fix it. It is also scratched with the names of former possessors, all apparently of seventeenth century date. Among them are:—"Thomas Warren fecit 1635," "William Lambert 1638," "Henry Brown 1640," "John Rcdgers 1640 " or 1649, "ffrancis ffryth 1642," "S. Hynam," etc.

^a Weston Underwood, Olney.



1



2

EXAMPLES OF "ST. JOHN'S HEADS."

1. THE VERY REV. CANON STOKES (No. 9).
2. FORMERLY MISS KNIGHT'S, NOW IN THE BRITISH MUSEUM (No. 22).

10. (*Type B.*) *Gloucester Museum.*

Present height, $7\frac{3}{8}$ inches; width, $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

This example is unfortunately broken at the top, and its exact height cannot be ascertained. It has also been painted white, and all traces of the original colouring are thus obliterated; there are however signs of the usual groups of spots powdered on the field.

The saint's head lies on a plain dish $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. The hair is parted into three locks on the forehead, and the beard is divided in the middle.

In base is a figure of the Holy Lamb, couchant on the ground, but its head has been broken.

On the dexter side of the panel is St. Peter with a long key and book; and on the sinister side an archbishop in albe, cope, and mitre, and carrying a cross and book.

The back is not cut away at the bottom, and has towards the dexter lower corner a lead plug with latten wire stumps.

11. (*Type B.*) *The Right Rev. Bishop Virtue, Portsmouth.*

Height, 10 inches; width, $7\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

The saint's head is somewhat smaller than usual. It has no wound over the eye, and the hair is divided into pointed locks arranged round the head. The beard is short and slightly divided.

The charger is $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, and, unlike any other example, has been painted round the rim with groups of spots like those on the field.

Below the head is the figure of Christ in the tomb; the front of which he grasps with the left hand, while the right touches the wound in the side. The hair falls down over the shoulders and is encircled by a heavy torse.

On the dexter side of the panel is a tall figure of St. Peter holding a fragment of a key and an open book. His outer robe is lined with blue, and seems to have been painted red.

The sinister figure is the usual one of an archbishop in albe, cope, and mitre. The gloved right hand is raised in benediction, while the left holds a tall cross.

The whole of the panel has, as usual, been painted; the field dark green with groups of spots, and the hair of the three saints with gold.

The back is cut away at the bottom and partly up each side, and has two lead plugs with remains of the wire fastenings. The lower of these has been replaced by one of a pair of clumsy modern screws.

This panel was found lying on top of a beam in the cellar of a house at Waltham Holy Cross, but was unfortunately repainted by the person who discovered it. He afterwards gave it to the present owner, who removed the new paint, and was rewarded by finding beneath it the considerable traces of the original colour and gilding which may now be seen.

12. (*Type B.*) *St. John Baptist's church, Bristol.*

This example is known to me only from a coloured drawing in the Society's possession, by James Holland, F.S.A., described as a "Fresco painting in the church of St. John the Baptist, Bristol, 1828." Apart from the shading in the drawing, there can, however, be no doubt that this is one of the sculptured alabaster St. John's Heads.

The size of the tablet in the drawing is $9\frac{3}{8}$ inches in height and $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches in width. This is certainly not full size; but in the absence of any scale it is impossible to say how large was the original, which is unfortunately lost.

The saint's head lies on a round dish, painted grey with red sprigs, and has the hair parted off the face, and a short full beard. The hair and beard seem to have been gilt, as usual.

In base is a half-length figure of Christ in the tomb with his hands crossed in front of him. The tomb is coloured light brown, and mottled to represent marble.

On the dexter side is St. Peter with key and closed book, in a white undergarment, and cloak or cope of white with red lining.

On the sinister is an archbishop in mitre, plain albe, and white cope with gold border and red lining. He holds a long cross and closed book.

The upper part of the field is pale brown or deep yellow, with groups of five dark spots inclosing a red one. The lower part is painted dark green, with the usual groups of white and red spots.

Below the figures is a handsome double canopy of open tracery with embattled cresting. The set-offs of the pinnacles are coloured alternately red and green.

Behind the tracery the ground is dark green. The coving of the canopy is painted red with a lozengy pattern in yellow.

On comparing the drawing with the fine tablet from Amport church (see No. 25) it will be seen that the two tablets are by the same hand. The canopy is exactly similar in design and colouring, and it is possible that, as in the Amport example, the Bristol canopy was on a separate piece of alabaster, and is wrongly placed (as drawn) below instead of over the panel.

Nothing is known of the whereabouts of the panel, which is not preserved in the church.

13. (*Type c.*) *Rev. W. K. Chafy-Chafy.*

Height, $10\frac{1}{4}$ inches; width, $7\frac{3}{4}$ inches.

An interesting and originally very fine example, forming a transition from type B to type C. It has unfortunately greatly perished through long burial in moist ground.

The saint's head lies on a flat dish, $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, and has the hair hanging down at the sides. The moustache is long, and the beard is forked, with the ends turned slightly outwards. The forehead and other features are decayed.

In base was a figure of the Holy Lamb couchant, beneath some sort of canopy.

On the dexter side is a sitting figure of St. Peter in albe, chasuble, etc., wearing the triple-crowned mitre. His hands, and the objects held by them, have perished.

The sinister figure is a seated archbishop in cope, with mitre and cross.

Above, on either side, is the figure of an angel, unfortunately much mutilated, holding the dish on which the saint's head lies.

All remains of colour have perished.

This panel is now framed.

It is said to have come from the site of Pershore abbey, and has certainly been exposed to long-continued moisture.

14. (*Type c.*) *Leicester Museum.*

Height, $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches ; width, $6\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

This is a very fine example, with its original painting and gilding in good preservation. (Plate XXIV.)

The saint's head lies on a plain charger, $4\frac{7}{8}$ inches in diameter, with the edge painted red. The eyes are shown as open, and in the centre of the forehead is painted a bloody gash from which streaks of blood descend on each side of the nose. The hair is parted in the middle and disposed on either side of the face ; and, with the beard, is thickly gilt.

In base is a half-figure of Our Lord in the tomb, the front of which he grasps with the right hand ; the left hand is uplifted. Round the head is a torse from which issue drops of blood, and the hair and beard are gilt. The wound in the side is indicated with red paint. The tomb is painted light brown with black drops.

On the dexter side of the panel is a figure of St. Peter, clad in a white robe with gold borders and buttons, and a white cloak edged with gold and lined with red. The saint holds a large key, and a black book with gilt edges. His hair and beard are also gilt.

The sinister figure is, as usual, that of an archbishop in white mitre with gold orphreys, amice, albe with gold border and three large red buttons down the upper part, and white cope with gold border and red lining. In the left hand is a tall gold cross with spirally painted staff, and in the right hand a closed book.

Above the saint's head appears a cherub's head and outstretched wings, the hair and wings being gilt ; and over this, again, is a flat canopy with gold battlements and powdered with black spots.

The field is painted green, and is without the usual spots.

The back of the panel is quite flat, with two lead plugs with ends of latten wires.

This example is specially interesting from preserving entire its original case or housing.

This is an oaken box, 12 inches high and $8\frac{1}{4}$ inches across, with sloping sides and double doors. The top and bottom are not carried straight across, but rise from the sides to the centre, so that the closed doors, when the panel is laid on its back, resemble the gabled roof of a house. The outside of the case is quite plain,



A "ST. JOHN'S HEAD" OF ALABASTER
IN THE LEICESTER MUSEUM, WITH ITS ORIGINAL CASE.

(1. 1000)

See also Plate II. British Museum.

Length, 14 inches; width, 8 inches.

This is a very small tablet, with its original painting and gilding in good preservation.

The tablet is in the shape of a shield, 14 inches in diameter, with the edge curved round. The upper surface is sloping, and in the centre of the forehead is carved a wound from which two streams of blood descend on each side of the face; the hair and beard are painted on the mouth and disposed on either side of the face; and the eyes are carved in the face.

The upper surface of the tablet is the tomb, the front of which he grasps with the right hand. The left hand is uplifted. Round the head is a torse from which two streams of blood descend, and the hair and beard are gilt. The wound in the side is painted with red paint. The tomb is painted light brown with black drops.

On the front side of the panel is a figure of St. Peter, clad in a white robe with gold borders and buttons, and a white cloak edged with gold and lined with red. The saint holds a large key, and a black book with gilt edges. His hair and beard are also gilt.

The front figure is, as usual, that of an archbishop in white mitre with gold ornaments, albe with gold border and three large red buttons down the front part, and white cope with gold border and red lining. In the left hand is a tall gold cross with spirally painted staff, and in the right hand a closed book.

Below the saint's head appears a cherub's head and outstretched wings, the hair and wings being gilt; and over this, again, is a flat canopy with gold battlements and powdered with black spots.

The field is painted green, and is without the usual spots.

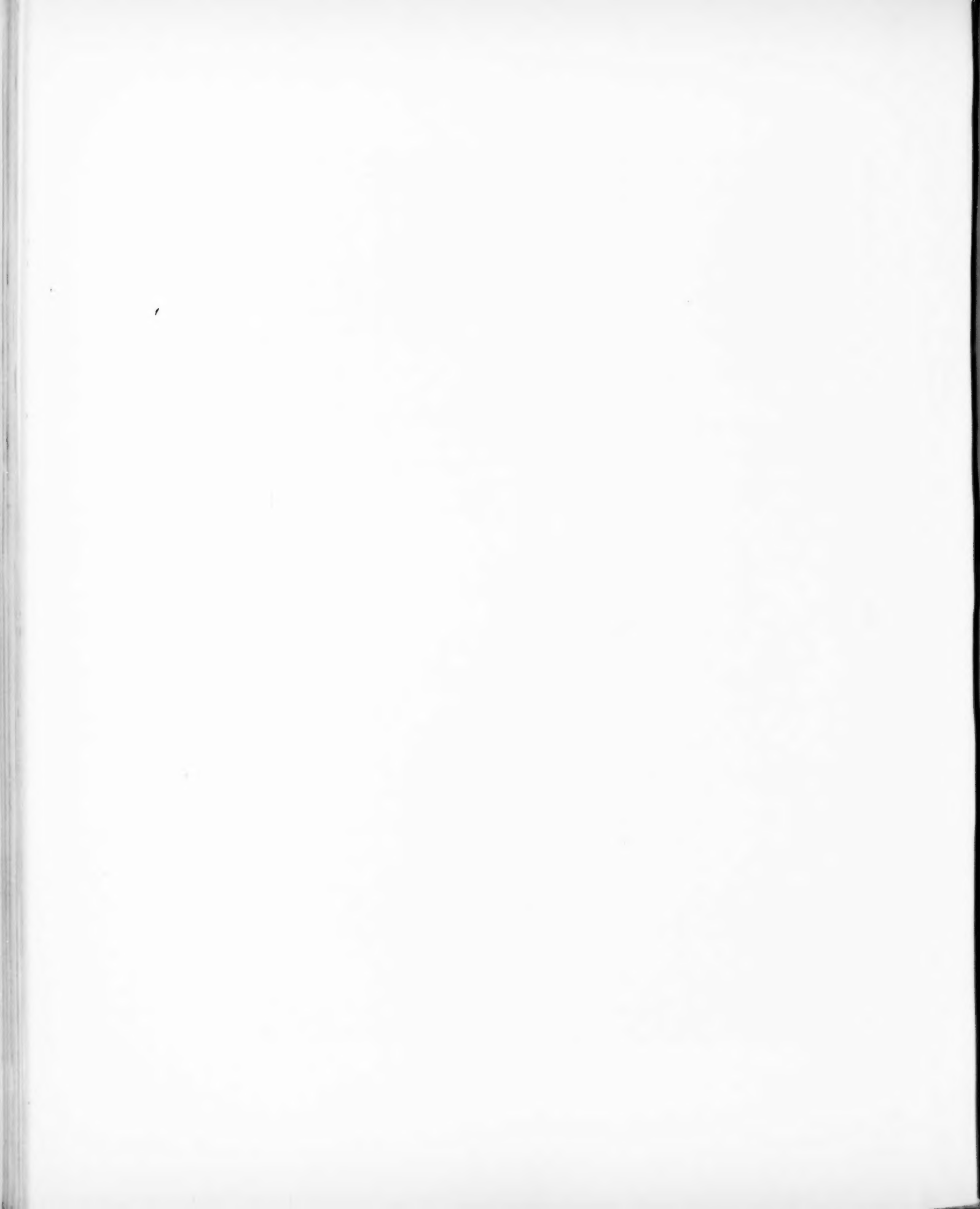
The back of the panel is quite flat, with two lead plugs with ends of latten wires.

This example is specially interesting from preserving entire its original case or housing.

This is an oak box, 12 inches high and 8½ inches across, with sloping sides and double doors. The top and bottom are not carried straight across, but rise from the sides to the centre, so that the closed doors, when the panel is laid on its back, resemble the gabled roof of a house. The outside of the case is quite plain,



A "ST. JOHN'S HEAD" OF ALABASTER.
IN THE LEICESTER MUSEUM, WITH ITS ORIGINAL CASE (No. 14).
(*1/2* *linear*)



but the inside still retains its original painted and gilded decoration. The top, sides, and bottom are white, with black and red leafwork; and a similar pattern is painted on a wooden block upon which the tablet stands. The doors are painted with an upper and a lower panel, divided by a broad strip with black and red leaves on a white ground and bordered, as are the doors, with red. The panels are painted green, with red cusped tracery, and have in the centre a gold ring of gesso work with slightly raised bosses. On the dexter door the upper ring contains a white rose on a black ground; and the lower ring a gold star or estoile of eight straight and as many wavy rays on a red ground. On the sinister door the star is in the upper panel and the rose in the lower. These devices possibly represent the white rose and blazing sun of the House of York.

The back of the case is of modern deal, and the original wire hinges have been replaced by others of brass.

Nothing appears to be known of the history of this example, nor does there seem to be any record of how the Leicester museum came by it.

15. (*Type c.*) Penes T.[homas] A.[lderley] in 1824.

This example is missing.

It is described in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824,^a by "T. A." who purchased it about fifty years before at a sale of the effects of the Rev. Mr. Wickham, of Horrington, Somerset.

The head of the saint he describes as corresponding exactly with the engraving of Mr. Nichols' example on page 209.

The flanking saints were St. Peter and the archbishop.

In base was the Holy Lamb and at the top the head of an angel (probably as in the Leicester example).

16. (*Type c.*) *British Museum.*

Total height, 14 inches; width, 6 inches.

The saint's head lies on a plain circular dish with, originally, a narrow red edging, and has the hair arranged in short curly locks round the head; the

^a Part ii. p. 292.

beard is short and rounded, and, together with the hair, was at one time gilt.

The wound over the left eye is plainly shewn.

The figure of Christ in base is, as usual, shewn as issuing from the tomb, the edge of which is grasped by the left hand, while the right is placed against the wound in the side. The long black hair falls over the shoulders and is encircled by a heavy dark-coloured torse.

The figure of St. Peter on the dexter side of the panel is vested in a girded albe, and cope with red lining. In his hands are the key and book. His hair and beard are gilt.

The archiepiscopal figure on the sinister side is habited in amice, albe, and white cope edged with gold and lined with red, and holds in his right hand a book and in his left a tall gold cross.

At the top of the panel are two angels issuing from clouds painted red. They are clad in albes and have red wings with eyes thereon like peacock's feathers. The angels hold between them a napkin from which issues a human head. The background to this is gilt.

The field of the panel is painted green, with the characteristic groups of red and white spots, which in this example are rather larger than usual.

The back of the panel is apparently cut away at the bottom, but the hollow is now plastered up. There is also one of the lead plugs for latten wire towards the upper part of one side.

To the bottom of this panel there is attached by plaster a block of alabaster with embattled top and simple bands down the middle and at the sides. It is slightly hollowed beneath, and is clearly a plain canopy for the panel now wrongly attached to the base. The mouldings bear traces of gilding, and the battlements were picked out with red.

This example originally belonged to Mr. J. B. Nichols, F.S.A. and is one of the two referred to by him in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824.^a

17. (*Type c.*) *British Museum.*

Height, $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches; width, $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

This interesting example (Plate XXII. fig. 2) was formerly in the possession of the late Mr. J. B. Nichols, F.S.A. and is one of the two referred to by him in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824,^b where it is also figured.^c

^a Part i. page 397.

^b Part i. page 397.

^c Part ii. page 209.

The saint's head lies on a plain dish with gilt edge, and has the hair and beard disposed in corkscrew curls, which bears traces of gilding. There is no cut on the forehead.

In base is a figure of the Holy Lamb, couchant to the dexter.

The figure of St. Peter on the dexter side represents him as a pope in amice, girded albe, fanon, and white cope edged with gold and lined with red, and wearing the triple crown or mitre. His beard is gilt and in his hands are a book and key.

The archbishop on the opposite side wears an albe, and white cope lined with red, and holds in his left hand a tall cross.

In the upper part of the panel are two angels with gilt hair and red wings with white "eyes," holding between them a cloth or bag, from which issues a small human figure with gilt hair.

Over all is a projecting tester or canopy with embattled edge, and painted with black stripes on top. The under side is splashed with black.

The field of the panel is, as usual, painted green with groups of white and red spots.

The back of the panel is slightly cut away at the bottom, and has two lead plugs for wire fastenings, one on each side. At the sides the alabaster has been scraped away somewhat, probably for medicinal purposes.

Below the panel there is now a modern block of soft deal cut in imitation of the canopy fixed to the base of the last-mentioned example.

18. (*Type c.*) *Salisbury Museum.*

Height, $10\frac{5}{8}$ inches; width, 7 inches.

This example has unfortunately been damaged at the top, and the colouring has all perished.

The head of St. John the Baptist lies on a plain dish, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and has the hair parted off the face in small wavy curls. The moustache is long and drooping. The beard is nearly covered by the figure of Christ below.

Our Saviour is represented from the waist up issuing from a long tomb. The hair is bound with the crown of thorns and falls over the shoulders, and the hands are extended on each side to show the nail-prints.

The figure of St. Peter on the dexter side is represented in a girded robe and cloak, and holding a large key and book.

The opposite figure is the usual one of an archbishop in mitre, albe, and unclasped cope, holding a book and long cross.

Both figures had the outer vestment lined with red.

At the top of the panel are two angels issuing out of clouds, and holding up a large pointed oval with an erect naked figure of a soul therein. The angels' wings have been painted red; their heads have been broken off.

The back of the panel is flat, with the usual rough chopping away at the bottom, and has two lead plugs for wire fastenings.

Engraved in the *Archæological Journal*, xii. 185.

Presented to the Salisbury Museum by J. E. Nightingale, Esq. F.S.A.

19. (*Type c.*) *Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.*

Height, $11\frac{5}{8}$ inches; width, $7\frac{5}{8}$ inches.

A fine example, preserving much of its original colouring.

The saint's head lies on a plain dish, $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, with traces of an illegible black-letter inscription round the rim, and has the hair parted in the middle and hanging down straight on each side. The moustache appears only above the corners of the mouth, and the beard is formed of two portions each turned outwards, but apparently not divided. The eyes are open, and there is no cut on the forehead.

In base is a half-length figure of Christ with long hair and short beard, wearing the crown of thorns and standing in the tomb, the front of which he grasps with both hands.

The central subject is flanked by two saints; on the dexter by St. Peter in a blue robe, and holding a key and book; on the sinister by an archbishop in a red cope, with cross and book.

Above are two angels, unfortunately headless, with red wings, holding up a pointed oval with a naked soul.

The background of the panel is painted dark green, with groups of five white and central red spots.

20. (*Type c.*) *Rouen Museum.*

This example, although now in France, is clearly one of this series of English sculptures.

It has the head of St. John Baptist on a dish in the centre, with the figure of Christ below, and across the top a row of five angels.

The flanking saints are St. Peter and the archbishop.

21. (*Type v?*) Formerly in the possession of David Wells, Esq., F.S.A.

Height, $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches; width $5\frac{7}{8}$ inches.^a

Exhibited to the Society of Antiquaries on November 12th, 1789, by the Rev. John Pridden, F.S.A., and described by him as

An antique piece of sculpture in marble, an ICUNCULA composed of various figures in alto-relievo and grouped together without any meaning, unless it was to represent the tutelar saints belonging to the Family original Possessor of it. In the middle is placed the head of St. John the Baptist on a discus and surrounded by five figures the head of St. John is considerably larger than the figures; on the dexter side is a whole length figure of St. Peter holding a key in his right and a book in his left hand, and over him is a half length figure of St. Catherine with a wheel in her right hand; on the sinister side is another whole length figure mitred &c, and supposed to be an archbishop from his holding a pontifical cross in his left hand instead of a Crozier, the crosier only being appropriated to Bishops and Abbots. the half figure over this is broken off and nothing remains but the left hand, at the bottom and between St. Peter and the archbishop is a figure of a Person rising out of a tomb, the head gone intended for Lazarus there being no traces of a nimbus. The whole of this group has been painted, and the cross on the archiepiscopal staff gilt. This last piece of sculpture is accompanied with a drawing, the size of the original, and which represents a facsimile, it was preserved for many years as a curiosity in the mansion house of a respectable family in Staffordshire, and most probably was originally placed in some small chapel or closet oratory. It now . . . forms part of the Collection of David Wells of Burbach in the County of Leicester Esq.; a Gentleman well known for his literary talents, and antiquarian researches.^b

This panel is engraved by Schnebbelie in his *Antiquaries Museum*, published in 1791, and also by Nichols in his *History of Leicestershire*.^c Nichols says it was exhibited to the Society in 1789 by Mr. Wells, who communicated the following description of it:

It is inclosed in a box, or tabernacle, with double doors, after the old manner of pictures, the better to preserve it from injury and dust, to be opened and shut occasionally. Such representations were formerly often placed in small oratories or chapels. The middle figure is the head of St. John the Baptist on a discus, etc.

The rest of his description is to the same effect as that in our minute book.

^a These dimensions are from the engraving given by Nichols, which appears to be full size.

^b Minute Book, xxiii. 177.

^c Vol. iv. part ii. page 461.

Mr. Wells died without issue in 1790, when his property descended to his nephew, who sold it in 1795. Since then the tablet has been lost sight of.

The plate engraved by Nichols also appears in Fosbroke's *Encyclopædia of Antiquities*,^a published in 1825, where it is described as representing the Syrian legend of the image of Christ, a theory first suggested by Dr. Meyrick in a letter to Mr. J. B. Nichols, printed in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824.^b

This tablet is of the same character as others of the series, and has the field diapered with the usual groups of spots. The figure of Christ in base has the bands crossed in front of the body. The head of St. John has the head parted off the face and the beard divided. The original tablet has evidently suffered considerable injury, especially at the top, and it is doubtful whether it belongs to type b or is an example intermediate between that and type c.

It is possible that this example may be the one described in the following note, for which I am indebted to J. E. Nightingale, Esq., F.S.A.:

Copy of a Note of mine in *Catalogue of the Manchester Exhibition*, 1857.

"Alabaster St. John—same size as mine—more in relief—heavier art, more German—figures the same, with two saints, St. Catherine and St. Peter—a deep gash cut in St. John's forehead—a canopy placed over but not attached, might be different work—faces generally ugly—charger distinctly seen—called a 'Tryptic' (it has wings in wood), labelled,

'German or Flemish, late 15th cent.'

HENRY BOWDEN, Esq."

No particulars given in Catalogue. J. E. N.

22. (Type v.) *Miss Knight*.^c

Height, $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches; width, $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

This is an almost perfect example, but has been denuded of all its original colouring. (Plate XXIII. fig. 2.)

The head of St. John the Baptist is represented lying on a plain round dish, $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, with the hair arranged in pointed curls across the forehead and at the sides of the face. The moustache is long and drooping, and the

^a Vol. ii. page 683.

^b Part i. page 397.

^c This example has since been acquired by the British Museum.

beard is short and disposed in two wavy curls. There is no cut over the left eye.

In base is the figure of Christ in the tomb. The hands have the nail-prints, and are bound with a cord in front of the body. The head has long hair bound with a torse as the crown of thorns, and is inclined to the right. The tomb has plain mouldings round the top and base.

The dexter figure is, as usual, that of St. Peter, in girded albe and choir cope, holding a large key and closed book.

The sinister figure is that of an archbishop, with mitre, albe, and choir cope, holding up a book in his right hand and in his left a long cross. The staff of this had the part below the hand made of a separate piece of alabaster, now lost.

Over St. Peter is a figure in gown and tippet holding a closed book, and in his right hand a staff. The head of this is broken, and it is therefore difficult to identify the saint.

The opposite figure is that of St. James the Great as a pilgrim, with a shell on the front of his hat, and holding a book and bourdon.

Over the head of St. John are two small angels with long hair, holding up a pointed oval formed of rays, on which is a small naked figure with long hair of the fashion prevalent in the reign of Edward IV.

The back of the tablet is flat, cut away roughly at the bottom, with two lead plugs for the wire fastenings down the centre line.

23. (*Type D.*) *Penes Rev. W. Stukeley, F.S.A., in 1746.*

This example is known only from the engraving of it, already mentioned, in Stukeley's *Palæographica Britannica*, published in 1746.

It is described as exactly 12 inches in height, which gives the width, according to the drawing, as 7 inches.

The head of St. John the Baptist lies on a plain charger, and has the hair shown as hanging straight down.

In base is a whole-length naked figure of Christ sitting on a rock, or some such seat, his hands bound with a long cord, and a torse round the head.

The figure of St. Peter on the dexter side has the triple crowned mitre as bishop of Rome. He holds in the left hand a model of a church with a spire, and in his right a key.

The sinister figure represents St. Paul with open book.

Above St. Peter is St. Katharine, crowned, and holding a spiked wheel and sword; and above St. Paul, a crowned figure of St. Margaret with long cross and open book.

At the top of the panel are two angels issuing from the clouds, and holding between them a pointed oval with a naked figure therein.

It is much to be regretted that this panel cannot be found. It will be seen to differ from other examples (1) in the representation of the figure of Christ as whole length, instead of in the tomb, and (2) in having St. Paul in place of the archbishop.

Mr. J. G. Nichols, in his note in *Bury Wills and Inventories*, suggests that the figure of St. Paul is "probably the draughtsman's misapprehension, from the crosier of St. Thomas having been broken in the original."^a

24. (*Type D.*) *Rev. Edward Duke.*^b

Height, $12\frac{1}{2}$ inches; width, 8 inches.

This is a very good example, but has lost every trace of its colouring.

The saint's head lies on a plain dish, $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, and has the hair disposed in pointed locks round the face. The moustache and whiskers are curled, and the beard is divided into two large curls. There is no cut on the forehead.

In base is a half-length figure of Christ in the tomb, wearing a crown of thorns, represented as a torse, and a loin cloth. The hair falls over the shoulders. The left hand is broken off, but the right is shown holding open the wound in the side. The tomb is plainly moulded, and placed obliquely.

The figure of St. Peter on the dexter side is represented in gown and long cloak or cope, and holding a closed book and key.

The sinister figure is, as usual, that of an archbishop in mitre, ungirded albe, and cope, holding a long cross. The right hand, now broken off, was raised in benediction.

Above St. Peter is a figure of St. Katharine, crowned, and holding a wheel and sword.

^a *Bury Wills and Inventories* (Camden Society, 49), 255.

^b Lake House, Salisbury.

The opposite figure is that of St. Dorothy. Her hair is long and encircled by a fillet. In her right hand is a basket of flowers, and in the left a spray of three roses on one stem.

At the top of the panel are two angels issuing from clouds, and holding up between them a pointed oval, on which lies a small naked figure with long hair. This perhaps represents the soul of the lady who originally owned the tablet.

The panel is now affixed to a thin slab of slate.

Engraved in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1824, part ii. page 209.

25. (Type D.) *Amport church, Hants.*

Height, 18 inches; width, $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

This very fine example is not only quite perfect, but it retains the whole of its original colouring in an unusual state of preservation. (Plate XXV.)

The tablet is formed of two separate pieces: one, 14 inches high, with the sculptured head and figures; the other, 4 inches high, is a handsome canopy.

The saint's head has the hair disposed in three pointed locks on the forehead, with two long wavy locks at the sides. The moustache is short but wavy, as are the whiskers. The beard is divided into two forked wavy curls. The hair and beard are thickly gilt. The eyes are painted with blue irises, and open; the lips and eyebrows are also painted. There is no cut on the brow.

The dish under the head is $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter. It has the edge painted red, and round the rim is the inscription:

+ Caput — + — sancte
'istorie +

which may be translated:

The head of holy writ.

In base is a half-length figure of Christ in the tomb. The eyes are painted blue; the hair and beard are gilt, and a dark green torse encircles the head, which inclines to the right. The right hand appears to grasp the flesh of the lower part of the chest; the left hand grasps the front edge of the tomb. The body is quite naked, with the exception of a loin cloth edged with blue. The tomb is placed obliquely, and is painted black with white drops.

The dexter figure represents St. Peter in white robe and mantle, both bordered with a gold band edged with blue; the mantle is lined with red. The hair and beard are gilt. In the left hand is a dark blue book with a white leaf pattern and gilt edges, and in the right hand a gold key.

The opposite figure is that of an archbishop in plain gold-edged mitre, albe, and white cope. The vestments are bordered like St. Peter's, and the cope lined with red. In the left hand is a tall gold cross with dark-coloured staff. The right hand, which is covered with a white glove with blue tassel, is raised in benediction.

Above St. Peter is a crowned figure of St. Margaret, holding in her right hand a large gold cross-staff, and in her left a book bound in red with white leaves and gilt edges. The hair and crown are gilt.

The figure over the archbishop is that of St. Katharine, crowned, and holding in her right hand a spiked wheel, in her left a sword. The hair and crown are gilt. The wheel is painted dark brown. The sword has a green hilt with white lattice-pattern and gold pommel and quillons; the sheath is coloured green with a white twisted pattern, and white lines along the edges.

Both St. Margaret and St. Katharine have white dresses laced up the front with blue, and white mantles edged with gold and lined with blue.

Above the head of St. John are two demi-angels in white albes and amices, and red wings with eyes like peacocks' feathers. Between them they hold up a white cloth edged with red, in which is the bust of a small figure to represent a soul.

The field has the lower half painted green, with characteristic groups of spots and white branches; the upper half is coloured deep yellow with red branches, and at the top has a narrow black engrailed border.

The canopy consists of three panels of pierced tracery, with intermediate pinnacles. These have little gilt gables, the set-offs alternately green and red, and pendants painted brown. Across the top is an embattled cornice decorated with blue, red, and gold. The under-part of the canopy is a coving painted red with yellow strips in imitation of ribs; the interspaces have white branches.

This tablet is said to have been found in a house at Amport some twenty or thirty years ago. It is now cemented to a black marble slab, and fixed to the wall in the south transept of the church over a fire-place in the Marquess of Winchester's pew.



A "ST. JOHN'S HEAD" OF ALABASTER.
IN AMPORT CHURCH, HANTS (No. 25).

($\frac{1}{2}$ linear).



26. (*Type D.*) *Lord St. Levan.*

Height, $14\frac{5}{8}$ inches; width, $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches.

This example as a work of art is certainly the finest of these tablets. It is also of interest as presenting several unusual features. The colouring has almost entirely perished. (Plate XXVI.)

The saint's head has the hair disposed in pointed locks across the face and at the sides, and the beard is divided into two wavy locks. The hair and beard were gilt, and the eyes painted as open. There is no cut over the eye. The dish is 6 inches in diameter, and originally had a narrow red border. It also bore the inscription in black-letter :

[Caput] sci iohis B[aptiste]

Instead of the Holy Lamb or figure of Christ in base, this example has a seated figure of the Blessed Virgin, crowned and holding in her left hand a sceptre, with the infant Christ on her knee. The Saviour holds in his left hand an orb, which he is touching with his right as if blessing it. His head, which was worked separately and fixed by a wooden peg, is lost. The colour of Our Lady's gown cannot be ascertained, but its lining was certainly red. Her mantle or overgarment was wholly red. The hair, crown, and sceptre were gilt.

On the dexter side of Our Lady is a sitting figure of St. Peter with closed book and key. His hair and beard have been gilt and the book painted red.

On the sinister side is a sitting figure of an archbishop, in mitre, albe, gold amice, and cope with gold border. In his left hand is a long cross; the right is raised in benediction. His gloves have blue tassels.

The figure above St. Peter is that of St. Christopher carrying Our Lord across the water. He wears a cap, an outer robe lined with red and edged with gold, and holds in his right hand a branch of a green tree, which is broken. The hair is gilt. With his left hand he upholds the infant Saviour, who has an orb in his left hand, and his right raised in benediction.

The figure opposite is that of St. James the Great, in pilgrim's hat with shell in front, and holding a book and staff, the latter is unfortunately broken. His hair was gilt, and the book and lining of his outer garment painted red.

At the top are the half-length figures of the three Persons of the Holy Trinity,

represented as bearded, with long hair, and gold crowns; the hair and beards are also gilt. At the back of each figure is a large flat disc or nimbus, with traces of red colouring. The figure of God the Father, on the sinister side, has the orb in the left hand; the right was raised in benediction, but is broken. The figure of God the Son, on the dexter side, has the left hand upraised, and the right grasping a cross staff, which is mutilated. He also has a torse round the temples, to represent the crown of thorns. The central figure, of God the Holy Ghost, has the right hand raised in blessing; the left is broken off. The ground between these figures is gilt.

The field of the panel is coloured dark green, with the usual groups of white and red spots.

The back of the panel is flat with the bottom cut away; it has also two wide and deep chases at the sides. The top is cut carefully into a three-lobed head following the outline of the figures in front. The four corners as well as the top have each a lead plug, with fragments of the latten wire for suspension.

This fine panel is now preserved in the chapel at St. Michael's Mount, Cornwall.

27. Winchester, St. John's Hospital.

All that is known of this doubtful example is the following notice of it in Milner's account of the hospital:

In the dust hole near the apartments of the widows, amongst other curious antiques, was to be seen, 'till of late, the figure of St. John the Baptist's head in the dish; being the bust of the holy patron of the house. This formerly stood over the principal doorway.

In a note is added:

In the course of last year it was removed from its disgraceful situation, and erected in one of the cloisters of the house, by order of the Mayor.^a

^a Milner, *The History civil and ecclesiastical, and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester* (Winchester, 1809), ii. 208.



A "ST. JOHN'S HEAD" OF ALABASTER.
LORD ST. LEVAN (No. 26).
($\frac{1}{2}$ linear).



We now pass to the consideration of the meaning of the sculptures of these panels.

This is a subject beset with difficulties, and after much research I am afraid I cannot offer a really satisfactory explanation.

That there is a close relation between the principal subject and the accessory in base appears certain, since, whatever be the variations in the other features, the head of St. John is always accompanied by the figure of Christ or the Holy Lamb.

For a long time I despaired of finding a clue, but it at last occurred to me to see what could be found in the old English service-books. The Sarum books yielded nothing, but in the York porthos, in the fourth lesson for the feast of the beheading of St. John the Baptist, I found an explanation :

Caput Johannis in disco: signat corpus Christi: quo pascimur in sancti altari: Et quod ecclesie gentium tribuitur in salutem ac remedium animarum.

But though this explains the association of the head with the figure of Christ or Holy Lamb, I cannot see any connection between St. John the Baptist's head and the Sacrament of the altar.

Apart from this, the occurrence of the explanation in the York service-book alone is of considerable interest, for since, as we have seen, large numbers of these tablets were carved at Nottingham, which was then in the diocese of York, the particular phrase employed may have suggested the association of the emblems to the first designer of the tablets.

The figure of the Holy Lamb may of course also be given as the emblem of St. John the Baptist, but the final meaning conforms to that of the figure of Christ, whether as the suffering Man, or the Infant on His mother's knee.

The accessory or accessories at the top of the panels do not appear to have any special significance. That of most frequent occurrence, the representation of the soul held up by angels, may have reference to the saint, but it more likely represents the soul of the donor or possessor of the tablet, who thus desired to shew that he or she placed himself or herself under the saint's protection, and in more than one example the long hair shews that the figure is that of a woman.

The choice of the figures of saints is not easy of explanation, nor can I suggest the reason why the head of St. John the Baptist should be surrounded by figures of other holy men and women.

St. Peter was doubtless chosen as chief of the apostles, and St. Thomas of Canterbury as the saint whom Englishmen looked upon with such profound feel-

ings of veneration. It is, however, possible, that St. Peter was selected from his association with the church of York, and that the archbishop is St. William; in which case the two York saints would form fitting supporters for a subject derived from the York porthos, and carved by Nottingham "alablastermen" in York diocese.

The other saints represented are SS. Katharine (four times), James (twice), Margaret (twice), Dorothy, Christopher, and two others not easily identified. The choice of them does not appear to have been guided by any particular rule. It should be noticed, however, that St. John the Baptist and St. Katharine were very frequently associated together in medieval art; why, I know not. A beautiful little gold pendant, having St. John the Baptist on one side and St. Katharine on the other was exhibited before the Society in 1876, and is engraved in *Proceedings*,^a and the same two saints are sculptured on the curious lantern pendant in Patrington church, Yorkshire.^b In 1380 Edmund earl of March bequeathed to Sir Hugh de Boraston "un tablet ove les images de Seint John et Seynt Kateryne par dehors,"^c and in the inventory of the cathedral church of Exeter for 1506 one of the rector's staves is described as :

j baculus de buxo cum j pecia argentea et ymaginibus Sancti Johannis Baptistae et Sanctae Katerinae de ebore et duo capita draconum in summitate^d

and belonging to St. Paul's altar in the same church was

j front de panno lino stayned cum ymagine beatae Mariae in medio et ymagine Johannis Baptistae et Sancti Antonii ex j latere et ymagine Sanctae Katerinae et Sancti Nicholai ex altera.^e

As to the particular reason why these panels should have been so popular I cannot say. The Sarum and York service books show that the saint's head was held in high repute, and the sequence for the feast of the beheading on Aug. 29 in the York mass-book speaks of it as :

O beatum caput dignumque reverentia,
Quod in disco matri tulit feralis bellua,
Quod tam multos instruxerat de Christi notitia.

^a 2nd S. vi. 510.

^b *Journal of the British Archaeological Association*, i. 203.

^c Nichols, *Royal Wills*, 115.

^d Oliver, *Lives of the Bishops of Exeter*, 329.

^e *Ibid.* 360.

Here again we have the veneration paid to the head cropping up in the diocese of York, and it is worth noting that the town of Halifax is said by some to take its name from "the real face of St. John Baptist, hence called Hallifax, or Holy-Face," reported to have been preserved there.* Beyond, however, the fact of the parish church of Halifax being dedicated to St. John the Baptist, there appears to be no foundation for the story.

The only place of pilgrimage to St. John's head that I have met with in England was at Trimmingham, Norfolk, concerning which Blomfield says :

In this church was (as pretended) a famous relick in times of popery, the head of St. John the Baptist, to which pilgrimages, great worship, and offerings were made. In one of the will books at *Norwich* is that of *Alice Cook* of *Horstead*, wife of *Robert Cook* of *Crosthewytin*, in 1478 ;—"It. I wyll have a man to go a pilgrimage to St. John hys hede of *Trymmyngham*." ^b

St. John's head in a charger is carved in one of the spandrils of the screen in Trimmingham church,^c which is also dedicated in the saint's honour.

I have now laid before the Society all that I have been able to learn as to the history and meaning of these sculptures.

They are curious examples of a medieval tablet in which the same design was copied and multiplied, and it is clear that they were not panels for reredoses, but devotional tablets of a special kind that could be hung up, perhaps favoured by the members of some large gild.

The object of veneration, as I have shown, is not solely the head of St. John the Baptist, but in some mystical way at present unknown a connection of it with the sacrament of the altar.

Until further evidence is forthcoming, it would be useless to speculate what the gild was which favoured this particular device. I am, however, inclined to look for it in Yorkshire ; and maybe it was the famous guild of the Corpus Christi in the city of York itself. This theory, which was also independently suggested to me by Mr. Micklethwaite, has these points in its favour :

1. The tablets seem to have been restricted to private use, since they are not found in church inventories ;
2. The device is a proper one for members of a Corpus Christi gild ;

* *Watson, History of Halifax*, 207, 331.

^b *History of Norfolk*, viii. 179.

^c *Norfolk Archaeology*, vii. 353.

3. The explanation of the device occurs only in the York service-books ;
4. St. Peter is the patron saint of York ;
5. In 1478 the master, wardens, and brethren of the ancient hospital of St. Thomas of Canterbury at York^a transferred their house and possessions to the Corpus Christi gild, and so we have a reason for the figure of the archbishop on the panels ;
6. Several of the examples from the inventories which I have quoted belonged to persons whose names occur in the roll of the Corpus Christi gild.

Unfortunately neither the records nor inventories of the Corpus Christi gild afford any further help, and so the case must stand where it does.

^a This hospital of course continued to exist, and most fortunately was not suppressed with the gild in 1547. It was remodelled in after times, and still flourishes for the benefit of the poor of York.